

At my August program at the 4-H/Senior Citizen's Building, we continued with our Embracing Aging series by focusing on knowing your health numbers. There were six numbers targeted for discussion in that program that are particularly tied to saving and extending your life. These numbers are associated with cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, blood sugar, body mass index (BMI), and waist circumference.

As we reviewed the targets for each number, we also discussed the actions you can take now to help you meet these targets. It is no surprise that there were two universal action steps that can help you improve your health numbers:

- 1) Eat More Fruits and Vegetables
- 2) Exercise Regularly

Why do you hear so much about eating more fruits and vegetables as a way to improve health? On a very fundamental level, they are typically lower in calories, high in fiber, packed with the nutrients our body's need to function properly and can satisfy our most basic need for food in a relatively economical way.

So why do so many people struggle with including these foods in their daily diet? First, there is a perception that they cost more. It is true that buying strawberries can be more expensive during certain times of years, as can apples, or citrus fruits, to name a few. However, when you buy these fruits during their harvest season, they are much more economical. This same concept holds true for vegetables. Right now, tomatoes are ripe for the picking at commercial farms and in our local gardens. They are rich in vitamins and minerals our body needs and very versatile in how they can be prepared.

Another reason many people cite for not eating more fruits and vegetables is that they don't know how to prepare them. It has become so convenient to grab something through a drive through lane or pull it out of a box, that we have lost our skills for preparing our own food. When you make your own meals at home you have more control over the ingredients and preservatives commonly found in convenience foods. Meals made from home are also cheaper by the serving. With a little bit of menu planning (another skill that is quickly fading away), you can plan in a way that accommodates your schedule while boosting the nutritional value and taste from the foods you consume.

Geary County K-State Research and Extension has a helpful publication that can give you seasonal meal ideas as well as tell you when common fruits and vegetables are in season. Call our office at 785-238-4161 and ask for the publication titled "Simple Seasonal Meals" – MF3217. This can essentially serve as a grocery list to help you know what you can purchase for a lower price in the store or at the farmer's market. It

also includes some great recipes to try during all four seasons of Kansas weather. You will find the nutritional information for each of the recipes so you can make sure they meet your dietary needs.

We also have a publication that accompanied my program "Know Your Health Numbers" that you can ask for. This publication gives an overview of importance in knowing your health numbers for cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, blood sugar, body mass index (BMI), and waist circumference as well as tips on how to control these numbers in your daily living.

Enjoying life is a common desire for all of us. When we eat healthy and exercise regularly, we are making sure our health numbers support our desire for an enjoyable life.

Need a jumpstart? – Try this recipe for starters:

Balsamic Steak Skewers with Mixed Vegetables and Grilled Sweet Potatoes

Ingredients:

12, (12") skewers
¾ lb. beef sirloin (trimmed, cut into 1" pieces)
5 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
1 tsp. dried rosemary
1 tsp. minced garlic
½ tsp. salt (divided)
½ tsp. pepper (divided)
½ c. packed basil leaves
2 Tbsp. canola oil
1 Tbsp. water
1 tsp. mustard
1 pint grape tomatoes
1 (10 oz.) container white mushrooms (whole, ends trimmed, halved)
1 bell pepper (seeded and cut into 1" pieces)
1 medium zucchini (sliced into 1-inch rounds)

Grilled Sweet Potatoes

1 lb. sweet potatoes, cut into ¼" rounds
1 Tbsp. canola oil
1 Tbsp. sweet paprika
2 tsp. sodium-free chile powder
1/8 tsp. ground black pepper

Directions:

1) If using bamboo skewers, soak in water for 20-30 minutes.

- 2) Trim and discard fat from the sirloin. Cut the lean sirloin into 1-inch pieces and add into a large Ziploc bag, along with 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, rosemary, garlic, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Let marinate for 30 minutes while preparing remaining ingredients.
- 3) Prepare the grill for medium-high heat. Coat the grates with nonstick cooking spray.
- 4) Make a vinaigrette: in the bowl of a food processor, add remaining 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, ¼ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, basil, oil, water, and mustard. Process until smooth, about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Transfer to a small bowl and reserve.
- 5) To make the vegetable skewers, thread the vegetables in an order like, for example, tomato, mushroom half, bell pepper piece, and zucchini (threaded horizontally through the zucchini round). Repeat, dividing the ingredients evenly between 8 skewers.
- 6) Thread the steak pieces onto the remaining 4 skewers, dividing evenly between the skewers.
- 7) To cook, prepare the grill to medium-high heat. Coat the grates with nonstick cooking spray. Add all the skewers to the grill. Cook, turning occasionally, until meat is desired temperature and vegetables are softened, 8 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a platter, cover with foil, and reserve.
- 8) To serve, drizzle the reserved vinaigrette over the vegetable skewers.

For the sweet potatoes:

- 1) Prepare the grill for medium-high heat. Coat the grates with nonstick cooking spray.
- 2) Cut the sweet potatoes into ¼-inch rounds. Add to a bowl along with oil, paprika, chile powder, and pepper. Mix to combine.
- 3) Spread out the sweet potato rounds onto the grill. Cover the grill and cook until sweet potatoes are tender, turning once, about 10 to 12 minutes depending on thickness. Serve sweet potatoes with skewers.

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Nutrition Facts	
Calories	381
Total Fat	15.5 g
Saturated Fat	2.4 g
Trans Fat	0.1 g
Polyunsaturated Fat	3.8 g
Monounsaturated Fat	8.4 g
Cholesterol	45.3 mg
Sodium	449 mg
Total Carbohydrate	37.8 g
Dietary Fiber	7.5 g
Sugars	13.9 g
Protein	25.8 g

Dietary Exchanges
1 fat, 2 1/2 lean meat, 2 starch, 2 vegetable

Until next time, keep living resourcefully!